

Education for Citizenship.

Public Opinion.
CHARLES R. SKINNER.
If there is one institution upon which the safety and prosperity of the nation rests more than upon any other, it is the common school. The men and women of the future will be what the common school makes them. The common schools are better safeguards of the nation than forts or standing armies. Unless education for citizenship comes through the schools, it may never come at all. A young man may not know whether he will become a lawyer, a physician, a minister, a farmer, or a carpenter, but he ought early to know that he is sure to become a citizen, endowed with a citizen's rights and a citizen's responsibilities, and he should early be taught what these rights and responsibilities are. We have special education for all the busy professions of life. Why not, then, education for citizenship which may embrace all professions? The school tax is always paid by the state and the individual with less complaint than any other tax. There is a confident feeling that something is always paid back in fitting our youth for the duties of life. If this system does not fulfill the design of those who established and those who maintain it, in rounding out the lives of our boys and girls, if it is not making vigorous manhood and womanhood, if it is not pointing out the way for all to add to the glory of the state by a comprehension of the duties of the citizen, then in so far as it is failing to do what we have a right to expect of it. It was never intended that the free-school system of our state should mean simply scholarship. It means citizenship as well. Ninety per cent of those educated in the common schools of the state never go beyond the common schools, and yet they are sent out into the busy world as citizens without knowing the rights or duties of citizenship.

There is a periodical discussion as to whether we should have more Greek and less grammar, more of arithmetic and less of Aristotle. But that is not the vital point. The great question should be, are we doing what we can to make our children upright, honest, intelligent citizens of the state and republic? If we are not, we are not making men who will be needed to grapple with the problems of the future, which involve the welfare of the state. In all our schools, from the lowest to the highest, let there be taught to some extent the essential features of our Government. This implies the teaching of civics, that kind of civics which, without hypocrisy, considers public opinion a public trust. There is a very close connection between honorable politics and intelligent citizenship. I would have our youth know what causes and consequences are, what they are designed to do, before they are thrust into the world to learn of questionable methods from those who would use them for personal or corrupt ends. I would have them learn all these things with direct reference to their bearing upon the best interests of State and Nation, rather than upon the interests of individuals.

I do not undervalue the study of the higher mathematics, or of the dead languages, so-called, as a means of mental development; but I would combine therewith proper attention to living languages and living questions. It is no slight accomplishment to be able to write and speak the English language well. Good grammar and correct spelling are fully as essential as a ready knowledge of Greek and Latin roots. If we teach what statesmen and orators did and said in ancient Rome and Athens thousands of years ago, let us also teach what our statesmen and orators are doing and saying every year in Washington. I would have every school-house, every academy, every college, a nursery of patriotism, where it should be taught that the true American citizen is the highest type of manhood. I would teach American history, American statesmanship, American valor, American pluck to American boys and girls in American flag flying from every place where school is taught, or displayed in every schoolhouse as an object lesson that learning and loyalty go well together. I would have every national holiday observed fittingly in every school. There is a direct relationship between citizenship and patriotism. Much is being done in our schools to create enthusiasm. The most effective work in this direction is being done by the members of the Grand Army posts, who are active in presenting flags to the schools of the country. Schools and scholars and people are becoming interested in the movement which is growing every year. Our immigration laws need revising. We have opened our gates to indiscriminate immigration until we have found that we can afford now to demand only the best, and to reject the worst. Our naturalization laws need to be amended, and made uniform in every state and regulated by the Government. Judges should be more careful in judging of the fitness of those who desire to become citizens. There is safety, from now onward, in educated suffrage. The laws governing our system of voting should be strengthened to the end that every legal vote may be fearlessly cast and honestly counted.

But we cannot have the best citizenship unless we build a foundation upon temperance and morality. Good citizenship implies good morals. Where religious instruction cannot be given in any other way, let it come through the example of the teacher by noble example, for the moral influence of a teacher is sometimes more than the power of all sects or creeds. The true glory of our country does not consist in the millions which our Nation spends each year for education, but it is measured by what that education is doing to give a national character to our people, and to inspire in them a love of country and an ambition for the highest form of enlightened citizenship. So the education of the future, what ever else it may bring us, will, I believe, teach that the glory of American citizenship is the sturdy manhood which it develops, and that the glory of American manhood is in what it does to build safe and strong, and wide and deep, the sure foundations of good citizenship.

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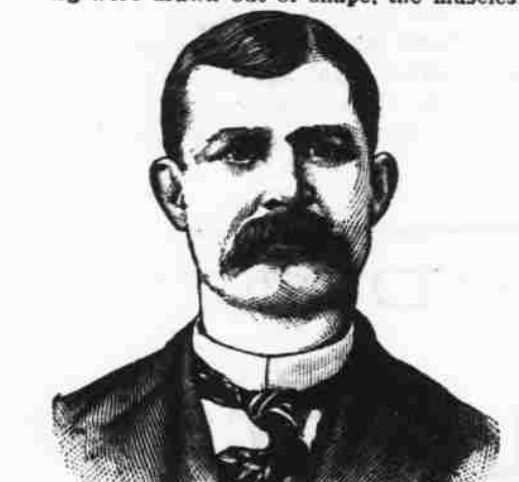
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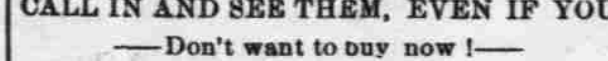
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